THE MIZAN NEWSLETTER

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The Mizan Newsletter aims at giving an objective and balanced account of current Soviet writings on the Middle East.

The first article in this issue, Agrarian Reform in Iraq, is an account of Soviet writing on what is perhaps the Iraqi Government's greatest practical problem. It shows that Soviet writers regard the Iraqi agrarian reform law as only a partial measure; like the Iraqi Communists themselves, they see it as only a first step towards the elimination of the landlord class. However, Soviet writers do not at present suggest or discuss any more far-reaching measures, whatever may be their views on a possible eventual "socialist transformation of agriculture" in Iraq.

The Yemen's New Port gives an account of the Soviet project for transforming Hudaydah into a modern deep-water port, which in the Soviet view will make the Yemen's trade independent of Aden.

A Reply to a UAR Anti-Communist gives the substance of a Soviet newspaper article, published in Azerbaydzhan, attacking a book published in the UAR entitled "Muslims under Communist Oppression".

In Soviet Angle on the News a leading topic is the Iraqi-Persian border dispute.

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AGRARIAN REFORM IN IRAQ

Soviet writers often contrive to give the impression that it is only they who show up real conditions in eastern countries, in contrast to capitalist writers who aim at concealing them. They would, however, find it difficult to maintain such a pretence in the case of agrarian conditions in Iraq. For example, the general picture of Iraqi peasant poverty and its causes is forcibly drawn in IRAQ, by S.H. Longrigg and F. Stoakes (London, 1958):

> "The economic problem presented by Iraqi land tenure is that on much of the cultivated land the right to its produce is held by persons - often absentees - other than the actual cultivator, and the latter, particularly in the south, must pay them a crippling rent for its use. In a country as primitive in its agriculture as Iraq has been, the total produce may amount to very little and the proportion retained by the cultivator barely support life. The system works viciously: malnutrition, itself debilitating, encourages disease, and as the capacity for work declines so does production. The tenant, lucky if his share feeds him till the next harvest, is in no position to store grain for seed and must borrow from the landlord. If he has a bad harvest or falls sick he will have to borrow his food as well, and while the debt remains he cannot by law leave the land; he then sinks to virtual serfdom. His landlord may in some cases determine the plot he cultivates, the crop he grows, the water he uses and the agricultural methods he follows; there is neither the incentive nor the scope for improving the holding."

Before the Iraqi revolution of July 1958 there was general agreement among expert observers on the need for a greater measure of reform than had hitherto been undertaken. Doreen Warriner, in LAND REFORM AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST (London 1957), says that "what is wrong with the big estates cannot be remedied except through a general measure of reform, including the redistribution of ownership", but also observes: "The present political position is as unfavourable to reform as it has ever been, although economic conditions make reform imperative." Similarly Longrigg and Stoakes (writing before the Iraqi revolution) say: "To dispossess the holders of land titles or to limit individual holdings has so far been considered outside the sphere of practical politics. Nor has it proved possible effectively to limit the landlord's share of the crop."

If these are the views of Western observers, it is not surprising that Soviet accounts of agrarian conditions in Iraq are uniformly condemnatory. Indeed, Soviet writers to a large extent confine themselves to quotations from Western (or Arab) writers on this subject, since these afford quite sufficient illustration of the need for reform. It is also not surprising

that Soviet Middle East experts have shown the keenest interest in the Iraqi Republican Government's plan for agrarian reform, as enacted in the law of 30th September 1958. Under this law no individual may own more than 1,000 donums of irrigated or 2,000 donums of unirrigated land, and, within five years, all land in excess of this will be confiscated. Secondly, confiscated land and State land will be distributed in parcels of from 30 to 120 donums, according to quality, to landless cultivators and smallholders. Thirdly, the persons receiving the land will join cooperative societies controlled by the Ministry of Agriculture which will organize marketing of produce and supplies of seeds, equipment, etc. At the same time the law lays down that the maximum rent to be paid to a landlord is 10 per cent of the harvest.

Russian interest in Iraq's agrarian problem Iraq's agrarian problem is, of course, a legacy from the Ottoman Empire; and it is interesting that a Russian observer of agrarian conditions in Iraq at the beginning of the century, the Russian Consul in Basrah A. Adamov, wrote a book ("Arab Iraq: The Vilayet of Basrah Past and Present", St. Petersburg 1912) which is still widely quoted by Soviet writers, as also are Adamov's consular dispatches in which he deals with such matters as share-cropping, the wages of agricultural labourers, etc.

The question of agrarian reform in eastern countries is one which has much exercised the minds of Soviet orientalists and which figures prominently among the priorities laid down by the Party for their study. Perhaps the first Soviet work on the agrarian problem in Iraq was a chapter by A. Galdzh'yan contributed to the symposium THE AGRARIAN QUESTION IN THE EAST, Moscow 1933. B.M. Dantsig's IRAQ, 1955, described as "a short geographical study", contains a chapter on agrarian relations in Iraq; and nearly a quarter of L.N. Kotlov's THE NATIONAL LIBERATION RISING OF 1920 IN IRAQ, 1958, is taken up with a description of agrarian conditions in Iraq at the beginning of this century. Soviet interest in the subject is also shown by the publication in Russian in 1953 of Ja'far Khayyat's THE IRAQI VILLAGE: A STUDY IN ITS CONDITION AND REFORM, which was published in Arabic in Beirut in 1950; and a Russian translation of Doreen Warriner's LAND REFORM AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST: A STUDY OF EGYPT, SYRIA AND IRAQ was published in Moscow in 1958. Soviet Middle East experts wrote lengthy reviews of Ja'far Khayyat's book - M.F. Gataullin in SOVETSKOYE VOSTOKOVEDENIYE No.3 of 1955, and Z.I. Levin in KRATKIYE SOOBSHCHENIYA INSTITUTA VOSTOKOVEDENIYA No.XIV.

The Iraqi Republican Government's law on agrarian reform has already occasioned a number of articles in Soviet periodicals. P. Demchenko, the correspondent of PRAVDA in Baghdad, contributed some observations on the reform law to SOVREMENNYY VOSTOK No.2 of 1959; although he praised the general aims of the law, he expressed some reservations regarding the scope and efficacy of the reform measures. More recently, A. Yefremov has contributed to PROBLEMY VOSTOKOVEDENIYA No.5 of 1959 an article on "Agrarian Rela-

tions in Iraq"; and MIROVAYA EKONOMIKA I MEZHDUNARODNAYA OTNOSHENIYA No.12 of 1959 has published an article by I. Vasil'kov entitled "Agrarian Reform in Iraq". With these Soviet views it is interesting to compare an Iraqi Communist's view of the reform measures, as given in Zaki Hairi's article in the April 1959 issue of WORLD MARXIST REVIEW (the English edition of the international Communist organ PROBLEMS OF PEACE AND SOCIALISM, published in Prague); Zaki Hairi is in general more free with his criticisms of various details of the reform law, while of course approving it as a whole.

Conditions before the revolution A. Yefremov, in his PROBLEMY VOSTOKOVEDENIYA article, quotes from Western and Arab sources figures illustrating the size of landholdings in Iraq; the proportion of the crop surrendered to landlords by cultivators; the average monthly income of the cultivator; malnutrition, and the incidence of diseases, such as malaria and trachoma; infant mortality, and the average expectation of life; and the flight of the rural population to the towns. He concludes that "in this way the overwhelming majority of the population of pre-republican Iraq in fact dragged out a miserable existence as paupers, with the situation growing worse and worse and bringing the Iraqi people to the verge of extinction".

Yefremov does not ignore the measures taken by pre-revolutionary Governments to deal with these problems; but he represents them as either ineffective or merely a deliberate camouflage. For example, he admits that in 1952 a law was passed providing that landowners might not take more than 50 per cent of produce; but, quoting an Iraqi source cited by Doreen Warriner, he claims that the application of the law was doubtful, and that in any case it made no difference in the miserable condition of the Iraqi cultivator. Similarly, he says of the agricultural improvement measures taken since the war:

> "During the last 10 years the monarchical Governments, in an attempt to achieve some improvement in agricultural production, however slight, and to put a brake on the revolutionary movement in the country, applied part of the income from the payments of the foreign oil monopolies to attempts to enlarge the irrigation network, bring under cultivation empty state lands and distribute a part of these lands among the fellahin. But [these] lands fell mainly into the hands of the big landowners, and the condition of the peasantry was in effect unchanged."

Similarly Yefremov quotes articles in the NEW STATESMAN and the American socialist MONTHLY REVIEW claiming that the Iraqi peasants had received no benefits from the big dam projects.

Iraqi and Soviet ideals Soviet accounts of the Iraqi agrarian reform law emphasize its declared aim of "liquidating feudalism as a method of production and as a political system", and liquidating the influence of the

"feudalists" on the state apparatus. However, Yefremov notes, the law "does not provide for the liquidation of the landlords as a class", and indeed only expropriates some 45 per cent of their lands. Demchenko (op. cit.) says that the number of landlords who will be deprived of land will not exceed 3,500, and that they "are left with comparatively large holdings and maintain their previous strong positions in the agricultural economy". The Iraqi Communist Zaki Hairi (op. cit.), going further, says that "only a radical reform which would limit the estate acreage to 400 donums could really change the conditions of the overwhelming majority of the peasants". However, both Soviet and Iraqi commentators agree that the law will nevertheless undermine the economic and political power of the landlord class.

Soviet writers agree with the present-day Iraqi land reformers in regarding land reform as in large part a class issue. The Great Soviet Encyclopaedia defines the agrarian question as "the question of land relations, of classes and the class struggle in the countryside, and of the economic laws of the development of agriculture"; and it explains how, when a feudal agrarian system gives way to a capitalist one, class struggle begins between the various class groups of peasants (Lenin distinguished five of these, ranging from hired labourers to "kulak capitalists"). The class effects of the distribution of land must obviously be a Communist preoccupation; will the new property owners be adherents or opponents of the Communist agrarian ideal? Yefremov condemns previous land distribution measures in Iraq as being "in essence an attempt to form a kulak class in the country". Will not the present measures, in Communist eyes, lead to similarly undesirable results; will they not set up a class antagonism between the new recipients of land and the 50 per cent of landless cultivators who, as Yefremov estimates, will still remain without land? The Iraqi Communist Zaki Hairi says of such a possibility:

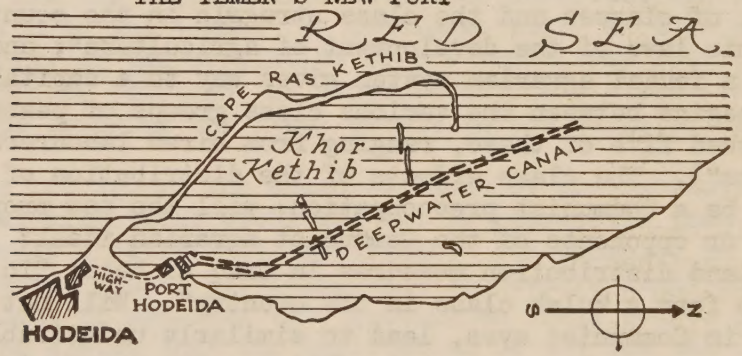
> "The experience of other countries shows that the reform may follow two diametrically opposed trends. It may, as is the case with China, result in the unshakable unity of the working peasants. On the other hand, it may, as in the case of capitalist countries, cause a split in the countryside resulting from a biased approach and unfair practices ... Should the agrarian reform result in dividing the land-hungry peasants this would signify that it had failed."

Soviet writers on land reform are presumably reconciled to the idea of private ownership of land in eastern countries, although in Russia all land was declared state property by the Land Decree of 8th November 1917. In contrast with the Soviet proceeding, the initial programme of the Chinese Communists (PRAVDA 2nd October 1949) was "to transform a feudal and semi-feudal system of land-ownership into a system of peasant land-ownership". No doubt with the Chinese example in mind, Soviet writers have since 1949 quoted with approval the principle "the land belongs to

its cultivator" as applied to eastern countries. However, this does not mean that the ideal of an eventual "socialist transformation of agriculture" on the Soviet model has been abandoned. In AGRARIAN RELATIONS IN SYRIA (1957) M.F. Gataullin quotes the Syrian Communist Khalid Bakdash as saying:

> "What we Communists demand, namely the liquidation of monopoly ownership of the land and the provision of land and water for the peasants, is not a socialist but rather a democratic measure which in fact does not go outside the framework of capitalist production relations. As regards socialism, that for our country is the next, higher stage."

THE YEMEN'S NEW PORT



In his article on the Yemen in SOVREMENNYY VOSTOK No.6 of 1958 (MIZAN NEWSLETTER No.10 of 1959) A. Sultanov says that "the British companies based in Aden, taking advantage of the fact that the Yemen does not possess a proper modern port, dictate their own prices to Yemeni importers and exporters". Similarly, in his article in NEW TIMES No.49 of 1959 on the Soviet project for a modern port in Hudaydah, G. Pyasetskiy asks: "How can the Yemen trade when she has not a single well-equipped seaport? ... Most of the country's trade goes through British-controlled Aden." The following information on the Soviet project is taken from Pyasetskiy's article (Pyasetskiy is described as "Collegium member, USSR Ministry of Merchant Marine"). The above diagram accompanies the article.

Hudaydah is to be transformed into a modern port with deep-water berths able to take ocean-going vessels. The port has been planned "so as to make it possible to enlarge it in the event of necessity". The piers, more than 400 metres long, will be equipped with three big cranes. There will be covered storage space of more than 11,000 square metres, a 6,400-ton oil storage tank, and customs and harbour office buildings. A diesel electric power station is to be built, water mains will be laid

to supply fresh water to the port and to incoming vessels, and machine workshops will be built to meet the needs of the port. A radio station and the first pier are already under construction and the future port is already linked with Hudaydah by a 3 km. long highway. There is to be a settlement with an hotel, and a club with roof-garden and cinema. The installation of the port facilities will begin in January 1960 and by the summer the first pier will receive its first big vessels. The oil storage tank will also be finished by then. The whole project is to be completed in 1961.

A REPLY TO A UAR ANTI-COMMUNIST

Successive manifestations of anti-Communism in the UAR have from time to time been reported and adversely commented on in the USSR, since February 1959 when at the XXIst Congress of the Soviet Communist Party Khrushchev condemned UAR anti-Communism as a "reactionary affair" which could only assist imperialism (MIZAN NEWSLETTER Vol. I, No. 2, pp.1-3). The mass trials of Communists have been briefly noted in Soviet press reports; and, in occasional longer articles, UAR newspapers have been accused of conducting an anti-Communist campaign. On the latter subject, in particular, bitter language has been used; but considerations of policy still inhibit Soviet spokesmen and writers from laying these matters squarely at the door of the UAR leadership and President Nasir himself.

It is evident that at present Soviet Communists say a great deal less on this subject than they feel. It is perhaps significant that the most outspoken reply to the UAR anti-Communist campaign so far has been published not in Moscow but in Soviet Azerbaydzhan, in BAKINSKIY RABOCHIY of 18th November 1959. In an article entitled "A liar in the role of 'defender' of Islam" Rauf Seidov denounces in violent terms the UAR writer Muhammad Sami Ashhur and his book MUSLIMS UNDER COMMUNIST OPPRESSION, recently published in Cairo.

Seidov begins by expressing indignation at Muhammad Sami Ashhur's contention that in the Arab countries the Communists work against Islam because Islam is opposed to tyranny and aggression and because tyranny is the end to which the Communists' doctrine, falsely disguised as democracy, is leading. Seidov exclaims: "What a monstrous contention! May one ask this protagonist of Islam how the humane commandments of the shari'ah are to be reconciled with what is happening today in his country?" He goes on to quote the Lebanese AN-NIDAL for an account of the torturing of arrested persons in the prison of Mezze, near Damascus; and, what is more significant, he quotes an article by the Syrian Communist Wasfi-Midani in the June 1959 issue of PROBLEMS OF PEACE AND SOCIALISM denouncing brutalities inflicted on political prisoners, Communists and non-Communists alike, in

the Mezze prison. At the time, Wasfi Midani's article went further than anything published in the Soviet Union on this topic (PROBLEMS OF PEACE AND SOCIALISM, an organ of the international Communist movement, is published in Prague); and Seidov quotes the following passage from it:

> "Recently repression has been directed even against women. The Government of the UAR, which proclaims itself 'the defender of Arabism and Islam', is perpetrating deeds unprecedented in Muslim and Arab history ... Mothers and young women are dragged half-dressed from their beds at night and thrown into prison."

As for resistance to aggression, Seidov goes on, it should be remembered how the Soviet Union came to the support of the UAR in November 1956 and in July 1958, support which President Nasir had at various times publicly acknowledged.

Seidov next takes issue with Muhammad Sami Ashhur regarding the abolition of the Arabic alphabet in the Soviet Muslim Republics, which Muhammad Sami Ashhur had represented as depriving the Soviet Muslims of their heritage and an attempt to divide them from the other Muslim peoples. Seidov explains the reasons for the successive changes of the alphabet from the Arabic to the Latin and then to the Cyrillic, and suggests that the Arab peoples themselves might in future find similar good practical reasons for a reform of their alphabet.

Finally, Seidov says that the author of MUSLIMS UNDER COMMUNIST OPPRESSION complains that in the USSR many mosques have been closed and have become ruins or have been turned into stables. He comments:

> "Muhammad Sami Ashhur is clearly not pleased that in our country the number of mosques has been reduced - he sees evil in this. But he should know the plain fact that the reduction in the number of religious establishments in the USSR is not an administrative act of the Government but the result of the enormous reduction in the number of believers since the Soviet regime was established. Soviet people, including former Muslims, prefer to mosques schools, theatres, clubs, cinemas and other cultural and educational establishments. Indeed our people have erected them in the place of many former mosques. At the same time all believers in the USSR, including Muslims, are given full freedom of religious worship ... All our visitors from the Muslim East have borne witness to this, and the President of the UAR was able to satisfy himself of the fact when he visited a mosque while in Baku."

Here, of course, Seidov is on familiar ground, and still more so when he goes on to claim that "the Muslim peoples of the Soviet Union, shattering the grim fetters of religion, have come forward on to the road of the development of their national culture", to prove which he cites statistics of

educational and scientific progress in Azerbaydzhan. But it is noteworthy that, in an article referring to Soviet-UAR relations, the official Soviet attitude to Islam should be so blatantly expressed. All this is perhaps a symptom of the impatience which is being bred in Soviet minds by the anti-Communist campaign in the UAR.

SOVIET ANGLE ON THE NEWS

Below are reviewed reports on Middle East events appearing in Soviet newspapers and periodicals during the period 7th December - 6th January.

The Iraqi-Persian border dispute Qasim's first speeches after he left hospital were not reported in the Soviet press, and the Soviet public was not informed of his press statement of 2nd December in which he claimed from Persia five kilometres of the Shatt al-Arab in the region of Abadan. The existence of the Iraqi-Persian border dispute was not mentioned in the Soviet press until 20th December (TURKMENSKAYA ISKRA) and in PRAVDA not until 29th December, when Iraqi Government statements were quoted complaining of Persian troop concentrations near the Iraqi frontier, denying the existence of any Iraqi troop concentrations, and affirming Iraq's desire to settle disputes between the two countries by peaceful means but at the same time asserting her resolve to defend her rights. The actual question at issue between the two countries was not explained.

However, a Tass report from Tehran, published in TRUD of 23rd December, gave an account of an "anti-Iraqi campaign in the Persian press". It said that, "after its attempts to prove the 'historic rights of Persia' to the Shatt al-Arab", the Persian press had been coming out with open territorial claims against Iraq. It alleged that the Persian newspaper ETTELAAT had published a leading article expressing the view that by rights Iraq should belong to Persia and the Iraqi Government should be appointed by Persia, and that towns such as Karbala, Najaf and Kadhimain were built by Persians and must therefore belong to Persia.

Soviet aid for Iraqi technical training centres PRAVDA reported that on 17th December Qasim received G.I. Zelenko, the head of the Soviet Council of Ministers' committee on technical education, and discussed with him the organization with Soviet assistance of a network of technical schools in Iraq. On 27th December, PRAVDA reported, an agreement was signed on Soviet aid in setting up 10 technical training centres which would not only turn out trained technical personnel but would also manufacture vitally needed industrial items.

Soviet aid to Syria PRAVDA reported that on 25th December two contracts under the Soviet-Syrian economic and technical agreement were signed in Damascus. One provided for preliminary work on the construction of a 3,000-kilowatt hydroelectric power station near Lake Homs, and the other provided for the designing of a dam and 550,000-kilowatt hydroelectric station on the Euphrates and the laying of transmission lines to Aleppo.

Turkish medical delegation in Moscow A Turkish medical delegation led by the Turkish Minister of Health arrived in Moscow on 10th December. In a speech at a luncheon given for the delegation on 12th December the Soviet Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs V.S. Semenov said that the delegation's visit was a sign of the improvement in the international climate, and that he hoped for better relations between Turkey and the Soviet Union. The delegation returned to Turkey on 21st December.

The Turkish press Recent sentences of imprisonment imposed on Turkish newspaper editors and publishers occasioned sarcastic articles in IZVESTIYA of 8th December and in NEW TIMES No. 1 of January. Turkish journalists, said IZVESTIYA, had nevertheless not lost their sense of humour; VATAN had observed that they were forbidden to enter government offices, schools or even libraries, "but we journalists are not discouraged, for we know that while the Democratic Party is at the helm the prison doors are always open to us". The reason for the campaign against the press, said NEW TIMES, was that the Menderes Government had decided to hold elections ahead of schedule, and "it wants to gag the press that has been criticizing its home and foreign policies".

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